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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005908

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL US JO

SUBJECT: PM ABUL RAGHEB TELLS DAS CHENEY GOJ WORKING ON  
LEGAL REVISION TO HELP STOP HONOR KILLINGS

Classified By: Amb. Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

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PM: "WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT DOING SOMETHING"  
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11. (C) NEA DAS Elizabeth Cheney met October 8 with Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb to discuss economic, political, and educational reform issues (septel). Ambassador Gnehm, USAID Director, and PolCouns accompanied. Planning Minister Bassam Awadallah and PM's Media Advisor Natasha Bukhari sat in on the Jordanian side. Following discussion of Jordan's economic reform program, Cheney expressed to the PM continued USG concern about the practice of honor killings in Jordan. In particular, she noted that Jordan has the potential to become a model for the region in terms of development, but that continued tolerance of the practice of honor killings stands in the way. Cheney noted strong USG concern with Article 340 of the Jordanian criminal code which permits honor killings, and Article 98, which is often used to reduce sentences for perpetrators of these crimes.

12. (C) Abul Ragheb responded that many outside Jordan have misinterpreted honor killings. "Islam is against it; it comes out of tradition." He said there is also confusion about the two sections of Jordanian law that deal with punishment for honor crimes. Article 340, most often cited as the "honor crimes law," actually deals with "crimes of passion" and can only be applied if a husband catches a wife in the act of infidelity and kills her or her lover on the spot. Abul Ragheb claimed that this law had only been applied three times, given the specificity of the exception. He said the GOJ has already amended this law to make it gender non-specific (i.e. spouse versus husband or wife).

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MINIMUM SENTENCE FOR ALL MURDER CONVICTIONS  
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13. (C) The real issue of concern, he continued, was the broader Article 98, which instructs judges to take into account the circumstances of murders in handing out punishment. Judges in Jordan have traditionally used Article 98 to reduce sentences as part of mediation efforts between families or tribes to prevent the start of a feud. They have also used this clause to reduce sentences in honor killing cases when the family of the perpetrator (which is usually also the family of the victim) asks for leniency so the guilty male relative can continue to support his family. The GOJ, he said, realizes that, in many cases, a man will kill a female relative for another reason and say he was moved to kill her to protect the family honor. Abul Ragheb said the GOJ wants to institute a minimum sentence for all persons convicted of any kind of murder (he mentioned 7 and 5 years as possibilities). This would ensure that those who claimed to have killed in the name of honor would not receive token sentences. If the government makes this amendment to Article 98 and honor killers receive "serious sentences, they won't do it any more." "We are serious about doing something about this."

14. (C) DAS Cheney noted the importance of a strong public message from the GOJ condemning the practice of honor killings. She asked if the GOJ would also consider a public information campaign on honor killings, and offered USG assistance for such an effort. Abul Ragheb said that the subject of honor killings had been taboo until 4 years ago, when the government and Royal family had begun a significant information campaign against honor killings. However, in 2000 when the GOJ had tried to amend Article 340, Parliament soundly defeated the GOJ's proposal. Parliamentarians voted against the law, he said, either to "save tradition" or "ensure law and order." Cheney reiterated the potential importance of such a campaign, and noted that the USG would like to provide support to end the practice.

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GOJ SUPPORTS ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT  
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15. (C) DAS Cheney had also discussed honor killings in an October 7 meeting with Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher (other topics reported septel). DAS Cheney told Muasher the U.S. stood ready to assist the GOJ in addressing this problem,

noting that changes here could have wider implications regionally given Jordan's potential role as a model on a host of reform issues.

16. (C) Muasher said the GOJ is working to address this "convoluted notion of honor that is deeply rooted in a socially conservative society." Muasher said that he is personally doing all he can "to give a signal that these things will not be tolerated." As an example, he outlined the steps he has taken since becoming Foreign Minister to eliminate discrimination against women in the diplomatic corps, including providing equal benefits and allowances for spouses and children of all diplomats, regardless of the gender of the officer (ref). DAS Cheney commended these efforts, and noted that there are broad issues of women's empowerment that require near and long term strategies to address. The issue of honor killings, however, is different and requires an immediate resolution.

17. (C) As the meeting concluded both DAS Cheney and Muasher agreed that the problem of gender discrimination is an important issue the Arab world must address, and that the recently issued UN Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) provides concrete suggestions for policy reforms to address gender equality issues. Muasher observed that Jordan is "the only Arab country that has fully endorsed" the report. The GOJ, he said, will continue to take a "very proactive role" in inter-Arab deliberations on these issues. DAS Cheney told Muasher that Jordan should consider the U.S. a partner in this regard.

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ACTIVIST DISCUSSES HONOR KILLINGS  
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18. (C) April Palmerlee, Senior Coordinator for International Women's issues, also raised the issue of honor killings during her meetings with GOJ officials and NGOs. Nancy Bakir, Human Rights Advisor to the Prime Minister, agreed with Palmerlee that honor killings are a serious matter but noted that societal attitudes are improving, and that the Jordanian media now regularly report on honor killings. In a subsequent meeting with human rights activist Sa'eda Kilani, Kilani said that people had become confused between laws with regard to honor killings and "crimes of passion," and that, in her opinion, the GOJ should do more to clarify the differences. Kilani said that the fact that any woman has to live in fear of being killed by her husband or close family member is tragic, and noted efforts of Royal Family members (in particular Prince Ali) to address the issue. "The Royal Court, in general, is quite supportive of women's rights," Kilani said.

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) Abul Ragheb's comments and pledge to amend Article 98 are the most positive statements from the GOJ on honor killings since the failed attempt to repeal Section 340 in 2000.

110. (U) DAS Cheney has cleared this message.

GNEHM